

Separatism and Quebec

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Suppose, just across the state line from where you live, secessionists had won an election taking over the local government. What would your natural reaction be?

Well, if you're a radical libertarian, you'd probably jump in the air with a whoop! Then after a fast jig over the imagined grave of the Federal State, you'd call up all your anarchofriends and tell them the good news. And then, I hope, you'd try to find any local libertarians in the area struggling for freedom, offer them whatever help you could in pushing their cause on your side of the line, and send them what you can spare.

Right?

So how come it didn't happen?

Quebec is right across the border from New York state. New York has from 1,000 to 20,000 libertarians, depending on the degree of activism required for definition. True, most are at the other end of the state from the province, but for about \$15 a bus ride or an afternoon's drive, one could get from New York City to Montréal. Yet if there is a single libertarian in New York who is involved with the Québec Separatist movement beyond reading the recent election results in the TIMES, your friendly neighborhood anarchocolumnist has yet to hear of him.

Perhaps not so coincidentally, the Libertarian Party's dead hand lies heavier on the New York movement than anywhere else. And probably the most any member thought of was that since the Separatists won the election, well, what more is there to do? After all, who can see beyond voting a Party into power?

Now all the rest of you libertarian revolutionaries-in-embryo out there may not be all that much better. How many of you have heard that the separatists' Parti Québec is socialist? You can put your hands down now. How many of you have heard of the Parti Québec? How many of you can see no relevance to the Péquiste (as the P.Q. members are usually called) victory on Nov. 15 to your libertarian goals whatsoever?

Let's start with that and work backwards. The breaking up of a State—even just splitting it in two—is a net gain for those who wish to see the State abolished or even limited. After all, libertarians have supported secessionism since Lysander Spooner. Even partyarchs support secessionism (in their Platforms or other such Holy Writ). Rothbard has written reams on national self-determination.

From a Counter-Economic view, just think of the possibilities for smuggling, monetary speculations, tax avoidance and regulation-evasion across three borders rather than just one

(Quebec-Canada. Canada-U.S., U.S.-Quebec)! And the three borders would meet at a point in the St. Lawrence River—right next to New York state.

Surely this is a tremendous gain for the rational self-interest of every libertarian in North America. And possibly around the world, for think of what a shining example the Québécois—right up against the center of world imperialism—would be to the Welsh, the Biharans, the Basques, the Meos, the Slovaks and Ruthenians, the Ukrainians, the Parsia, and on and on in nearly every country in the world.

Imagine, as socialism managed to tie itself to wars of “national” liberation, libertarianism was the foundation of the struggles of minority separatist movements around the globe. Think of Juan Carlos of Spain denouncing the subversive influence of the Rothbardeners; picture movie and TV clips of hard-eyed, uniformed guerrillas in the jungles taking their lessons in classical Mises and clutching their little black books!

The potential is, at least by now, obvious. Can one get in touch with the Pequistes? What are they, anyways, and how can we deal with them?

Working for the summer in Ottawa in 1967, I observed a by-election across the river in Hull, Québec, where the Ralliement Créditiste was running a strong race against the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals (the socialists have no support in Québec; they have yet to elect a single member to either federal or provincial legislature). Being still a proto-libertarian, I was a campus chairman of the University of Alberta Social Credit Party, so I thought I’d drop down to RC campaign headquarters and offer to assist them.

I found the local Créditistes flattered at being noticed, amused at my attempts to converse about our common ideology in French; they gave me a few leaflets to pass around and some literature. In short, they don’t bite; they are not hard to get in touch with.

If the average American libertarian can restrain himself from remarks like “How much is that in real money?” or “Can you speak white?” or “Sure is picturesque up here in Kew-Beck; guess I don’t need my parka in July“, he can probably communicate.

Obviously we will be in demand. The reason is simple: the war of secession (cold or hot) will be fought—not in Québec, or at least no longer there being the decisive battleground—but in Central Canada and the United States. If the federal government can be hamstrung by pro-Quebec and anti-interventionist activists in the rest of Canada, maybe even sympathetic groups starting out to Split Alberta and British Columbia off in the far west, Québec can win. And there is always the threat of the Marines landing in Montréal. (Don’t laugh; Canadians take that possibility very seriously, and all that is needed to exert pressure on the Péquistes is the *belief* that such action may be taken: i.e., credibility.)

Finally, what can one expect from a Separatist Quebec? Socialism? Yes and no. The first Separatist Party, formed about 1960, was leftist (I am not even considering the 12-member FLQ even if they did have a thing for bombs and kidnapping), and called the Ralliement pour l’indépendance National (RIN). (*National* in French and everywhere else in the world but American English, does not mean Central or Federal; the *nation* is a supra-tribe and so a National Party in Québec is *opposed* to the “National” government in Ottawa.)

In 1962, the Québec wing of the Social Credit Party rose out of nowhere to become a major voting bloc in the federal parliament: the Ralliement Créditiste. The deputy leader of the Québec wing was named Giles Grégoire, an intense ideological type as compared to used-car salesman Réal Caouette, In great danger of oversimplification, the Créditistes are sort of a mixture of populism, Birch-style anti-establishment conservatism, anti-communism and anti-banker. Apart

from their monetary theory (like Milton Friedman?), they are hard-core free enterprise. Certainly excellent material for conversion to libertarianism.

After the 1963 election, the RC split with the national SC; and later Grégoire Split with Caouette—over the separatist issue. Single-handedly, through an adroit use of parliamentary procedure, Grégoire stopped the entire House of Commons from doing anything about the Seaway Strike crisis. When his patriotism was appealed to, he replied that he owed nothing to Canada, which he did not even believe in. He left the House of Commons to start his own Provincial Party, the Ralliement National (I told you to watch for that word).

Then along came President Charles DeGaulle of France to infuriate his Canadian hosts and delight the nationalists. “Vive Le Québec Libre!”, the cry of the separatists, was heard around the world. In the next election RN got 3% of the vote and RIN 6%.

In the Liberal provincial cabinet, René Levesque heard his call. After leading a small splinter faction out of the Liberal Party (and helping the conservative-aligning Union National back into power briefly), he formed a Movement for Sovereignty Assn. to lobby for a separate Québec. Then, as an election approached in the early Seventies, he brought the RIN and RN into a coalition and formed the Parti Québec. To put it mildly, with Liberals, socialists and Créditistes, it was a “popular front.” The P.Q. scored 24% of the vote, though it won far less seats because of the distribution of the vote, with Liberals, UN and RC splitting the remainder.

This election Levesque played it cool, called for reform measures and lower taxes, and even won the support of the federalist editor of *Le Devoir* (a sort of French-language TIMES) Claude Ryan. He got 39% of the vote, and the federalists split the rest. It was worth 68 out of 110 seats, and Levesque is now Premier of the province.

Trudeau first said it didn't matter; then the Prime Minister said he would oppose the Péquistes taking Québec out of Confederation by any means he found necessary. Meanwhile, Levesque is playing moderate, calling for a referendum in two or three years on the question. Needless to say, those of us who do not believe in political parties expect him to sell out—but then there are the radicals who just might not let him.

Libertarianism is known to Créditistes: in fact, I have personally corresponded with a parliamentary assistant of Réal Caouette (a friend from Alberta). It could use a lot more exposure—especially to the Ralliement National but also the more thoughtful Liberals and even the radical Leftists if it is presented in a sufficiently revolutionary fashion.

This is no island or coral reef in the middle of nowhere we are talking about, but a province with a population of over six million containing the most cosmopolitan city in North America (eat your heart out, New York). Yes, there is a Libertarian Party in Québec, and of course it has made itself entirely irrelevant to the struggle there by attacking campus radicals and mouthing Objectivist code phrases. *Qui est Jean Gait and who cares? Ecrasez l'état* would sell—but no one is marketing it.

And maybe, just maybe, the seeds of secession still planted in the South, New England, the Pacific Northwest, California, and even New York City might sprout given the successful example just across the border. At the very least, libertarians can give the separatists a chorus of approval and sell their cause to sympathisers on this side of the line. Who knows; it might even keep you out of a draft uniform, patrolling the streets of Trois Rivières and dodging sniper bullets à la Northern Ireland?

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